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Opening extract from

The Comic Cafe

Written by

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Roger Stevens

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1
Ghost

S H E E E E A A A A A K K K K K ! ! ! ! SHEEEEAAAAAKKKKK!!!!

Vampyre's cry echoed through the lonely hills and valleys. The great bat-like creature drifted lower. The light of the gibbous moon glinted on its leathery body and wings. Its moon-shadow drifted slowly across the spiky trees and barren ground. Owls and other night dwellers hid from its view. It was seeking its master. And heading my way.

With a start I opened my eyes. Darkness. I could see only darkness.

I felt for the clock and peered at the luminous hands, trying to see the time. It looked like a quarter past twelve. No, it was three o'clock. I'd only been asleep for two hours. And I'd been dreaming of a favourite character of mine – Vampyre.

Sheeeaaakkkk! SHEEEAAAKKKK!!!

But the cry wasn't a dream. It was real, and coming from somewhere in the house. A chill ran through me, as though someone had opened a door and let a cold wind in, and I shivered.

I hid beneath the duvet. There it was again. But now it sounded more like a voice. Far away, but at the same time very close. I know that's impossible, but that's what it was like. Like the voices you hear in the horror films we're not supposed to watch. I strained to hear what the voice was saying.

Help me. Help. Help. Help. Help!

In the distance I could hear waves crashing on the beach, and all around the old house the wind groaning and rattling the windows.

Help me. Help. Help. Help. Help!

I got up, pulled on my boxer shorts and crept out onto the landing. I could hear Elizabeth snoring softly. She said she didn't snore but we all knew she did. No sound came from Jaz's or Briony's rooms.

I could feel some sort of unearthly presence nearby. Like a ghost, or unwelcome spirit. I looked up. Here at the top of the house there was a trapdoor in the ceiling. Was the noise coming from there? Was there something in the loft? A ghoul, crouching above the door ready to drop on an unsuspecting victim? A hungry ghoul with red eyes and sharp teeth?

Getting out of bed had been a bad idea. I should simply have buried my head under the duvet and gone back to sleep.

There was the weird moaning voice again, like a creature in pain. *Help me. Help me. Help me, Wilf!*

Did it say my name? I shuddered. I needed the loo. I crept down the stairs to the first landing. I listened at my youngest sister, Sammi's door. I could hear her soft breathing. Next to her room was Mum and Dad's. What if there was someone in there? An intruder? A burglar? I listened at their door. I could hear the sound again, but now it seemed to be coming from the café below.

I made my way slowly down the stairs to the ground floor, my bare feet treading lightly on the dusty bare wood. The stairs creaked. Before me was the door to the cellar. It was locked. In the cellar lived the Gargoyle – a gruesome creature, with wild eyes and green skin, half man, half giant bat, manacled to the wall with rusty iron chains. The Gargoyle had once been Lord of the Skies of the Underworlds, holding dominion over all foul creatures that flew. Not one of us had yet dared to enter the cellar and confront the monster.

I crept past the door and peered into the gloomy café. A glimmer of light from the road tried to illuminate the room, but it was hopeless. There was no way for light to penetrate the thick, sludgy layers of grime on

the windows, the salt, the dirt from passing cars and the seagull poo.

SHEEEEAAAAAKKKKK!!!!

A huge, white, ghostly shape ran towards me. My heart leapt to my mouth and I felt dizzy. I felt its body push against me. I felt its warm fur brush me. It hissed.

I let out a loud sigh of relief. It was only Killer – the enormous white cat we'd inherited with the building. Killer was no ghost – he was very real. He looked up at me, growled quietly and, back arched, crept stealthily back into the room, as though he, too, could sense the ghost's presence and was determined to put an end to its misery.

I turned on the light. The large room was a tip. Broken chairs and rickety tables were strewn about the place. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling beams.

There was a smell of decay, soot and stale food. Had the ghostly noises stopped? No . . . they were coming from upstairs again.

Help! Help me, Wilf. Wilf! Wilf!

I turned the light off, left Killer crouched in the café's darkness and retraced my steps. I paused on the first landing and listened again at my parents' door. The sound was coming from their room. I could feel my

heart thudding and my hands were damp. I opened the door slowly and peered in. The door creaked, but the voice stopped and I could see that there was no ghost there.

The room was lit by moonlight. There was Mum and Dad's unslept-in bed, the duvet piled up in a big, untidy heap where they'd left it. I peered hard at the shadowy corners, half-expecting something to leap out at me from behind the big cardboard boxes still waiting to be unpacked after the move. I felt suddenly tearful and I wondered where Mum and Dad were right now.

The ghostly voice stopped.

Silence.



Back in the warmth of my bed, I wondered if the house really was haunted. But I had no idea then, as I lay in the dark, listening to the distant waves and the wind in the rafters, that a greater mystery was waiting to be solved. Far more dangerous and scary than ghostly noises in the night.

Eventually I must have dozed off.

Vampyre was seeking its master – the Gargoyle. Vampyre